

Missouri task force meets today on stroke, heart response

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With heart disease and stroke making up one-third of all Missouri deaths in 2006, the state's leading medical experts are meeting today in Jefferson City to improve emergency response and care.

The Time Critical Diagnosis Task Force was formed by the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services and the Missouri Foundation for Health. It's charged with developing a coordinated statewide system for victims of stroke and ST-Segment Elevation Myocardial Infarction, STEMI, a common form of heart attack.

During the first meeting, Springfield Dr. Scott Duff and five other medical experts presented to over 100 participants representing dozens of organizations across the state. Duff is specialty certification-vascular neurology, and CoxHealth Stroke Team medical director.

STEMI sufferers who receive treatment within 30 to 90 minutes, and stroke victims who are treated within 180 minutes of symptom onset, have significantly greater rates of survival, reduced rates of disability and faster recovery times, according to a news release. However, only a small percentage of stroke and STEMI victims receive the recommended treatment within the recommended windows. Nationally, fewer than 40 percent of STEMI patients reach the hospital and are treated in the ideal time frame, the news release said.

Missouri currently has a trauma system that identifies specific hospitals as trauma centers. Studies show that such programs in various states have reduced the patient preventable death rate by 50 percent. Noticing the need to expand the program, states across the country started to create similar systems where stroke and STEMI patients are transported to hospitals identified as best equipped for their treatment.

States that have begun to implement a stroke or STEMI system include Alabama, California, Georgia, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Texas. Missouri's Time Critical Diagnosis Task Force hopes to design a program that will also reduce long-term disabilities, speed recovery times and save Missourians' lives.